DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 311 366 CG 021 981

AUTHOR Mosatche, Harriet S.
TITLE Caring and Coping. Contemporary Issues: Facing Family Crises.
INSTITUTION Girl Scouts of the U.S.A., New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 22p.
AVAILABLE FROM Girls Scouts of the U.S.A., National Equipment Services, 830 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022 ($1.25 each; quantity discount--inquire).
PUB TYPE Guides - General (050)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; Children; *Coping; *Death; *Divorce; Family Problems; Females; *Helping Relationship; Mentors; Parent Child Relationship; *Poverty; *Remarriage
IDENTIFIERS *Girl Scouts of the USA

ABSTRACT

This booklet focuses on three particularly prevalent family crises: divorce, the death of a parent, and poverty. These crises profoundly affect millions of children in their personal, academic, and social development. The information and activities in this booklet are provided to enable Girl Scout leaders to increase their efforts both in helping girls become aware of some common family stresses and in assisting girls in handling those serious family problems that personally touch their lives. The effects of divorce on children of different ages and sexes as well as the changes in family environment brought about by remarriage are discussed. The discussion on death of a parent focuses on the grieving by the child. The effects of growing up in poverty for children are discussed, examining the physical and emotional effects of poverty. It is noted that a strong adult can influence children's lives positively. Specific tips are given on providing the kind of environment which will help girls not directly faced with serious family problems to act with understanding and sensitivity toward those who are dealing with them. Suggested troop and group activities to help girls understand and cope with family crises are described in sections grouped by the level of Girl Scouting. Links to Girl Scouting programs are given and a resource list of organizations is provided. Supportive books for girls and adults are listed. (ABL)

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CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

Facing Family Crises

Caring and Coping

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Contemporary Issues

Facing Family Crises

Caring and Coping

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First Impression 1988
Printed in the United States of America
5 4 3 2 1

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Introduction

In the United States today, many families face a variety of serious personal, social, and economic crises. Even those children who do not directly feel the impact of family problems probably have friends, classmates, and relatives who have experienced difficulties as a result of these crises. Since children who have strong support networks deal best with the stresses that beset them, Girl Scouting can play an important role in helping youngsters understand and cope with family crises, whether these occur in their own households or in the homes of friends and acquaintances.

This booklet will focus on three particularly prevalent family crises—divorce, the death of a parent, and poverty. These crises profoundly affect millions of children in their personal, academic, and social development. Other family problems such as disability or the death of a sibling, substance abuse by parents or children, and family violence have been or will be dealt with in other booklets in the Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. Contemporary Issues series. The information and activities in this booklet are provided to enable Girl Scout leaders to increase their efforts both in helping girls become aware of some common family stresses and in assisting girls in handling those serious family problems that personally touch their lives.

The Scope of Family Crises Today

Below are some statistics that demonstrate how widespread these family crises are at the present time:

- By age 18, more than one-third of this nation's children will experience their parents' divorce, and perhaps as many as 20 percent will be involved in a second divorce some time later.
- Only 73 percent of White, 67 percent of Hispanic, and 38 percent of Black children live with both biological parents. Approximately 42 percent of White and 86 percent of Black children are likely to spend at least some time in a single-parent household.
- More than one thousand stepfamilies are formed each day. Over six million children under the age of 18 live in a household with a stepparent, with many other children spending at least some time living with a stepparent.
- In 1985, 3.6 percent of the children in the United States under the age of 18 had lost one or both parents by death. About 1,699,000 children had lost a father, 599,000 had lost a mother, and 33,000 were totally orphaned.
- Since 1979, the number of poor families with children has increased by 35 percent. At present, about five and a half million families with children live in poverty compared to a little over four million in 1979. Overall, one out of every five American children is poor. The figure for Blacks is even more tragic—one out of every two Black children lives in poverty.

Divorce and Remarriage

While the divorce rate in the United States has leveled off recently, and appears to have even begun to drop, over one million children each year still face the divorce or separation of their parents. Many factors determine how well children adjust to the breakup of their parents' marriage, and not all children react in a similar fashion. While the majority of parents feel that divorce has improved their lives, most also feel that the marital dissolution has had an adverse impact on their children. Mothers and fathers are often concerned that in creating more happiness for themselves, they are causing psychological damage to their daughters and sons. While it is true that an intact family marked by constant conflict, tension, and verbal abuse can harm children, divorce is always a major upheaval for them.

For those children who perceived their parents as happy together, adjustment to divorce is much more difficult than for those children who viewed the preseparation period as an unhappy time for everyone. In some instances, as a mother or father becomes the kind of caring parent she or he couldn't be previously because of the tension in the home, children benefit from the family reorganization. And if one parent has been physically or emotionally abusive, children are frequently openly relieved by the departure of that parent.

Upon first learning of an impending divorce, a child's reaction may be shock. Once they begin to accept the reality of the situation, children usually experience deep grief and depression. These emotions are sometimes expressed indirectly—perhaps as accident proneness or rebellious behavior such as lying or stealing. In time, anger and bitterness may replace the sadness. Some youngsters become destructive or aggressive, venting their frustration on their possessions, peers, or parents.

Some children react physically to the stress of divorce, developing nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, headaches, or asthma attacks. Other children show lower academic achievement and higher rates of absenteeism and lateness. Doing poorly in school may result from an inability to concentrate; or it may be a conscious or unconscious way to punish parents for the pain they have caused.

Children react to divorce with varying degrees and types of distress, depending on their age. While preschoolers may initially be more emotional, they seem to adapt faster than older children. However, young children often respond to the separation from a parent with denial, asking repeatedly, "When is Daddy coming back?" or "Why isn't Mommy here?" By five or six, children are usually capable of understanding what happens in a divorce, but many still fantasize about the missing parent's return. They need reassurance that they will not be abandoned and will continue to be loved by both parents. This reassurance may come from a strong, loving relationship with a grandparent, aunt, uncle, or other family member.

Elementary school-age children are concerned about having to move away from friends or start in a new school. They worry about where the noncustodial parent will live and whether they will see her or him. It is a time of intense sadness and powerlessness for them. Adolescents often manifest the damaging effects of divorce most openly. Running away from home, stealing, substance abuse, sexual activity, even suicide attempts are some of the ways they can cry out for attention and express their distress. After divorce, children are forced to deal not only with their own feelings of loss, but they must also cope with the sadness and confusion their parents are experiencing. In some instances, teenagers virtually lose their childhood when their parents divorce. They become the main source of emotional support for their siblings and their parents, and take on many of the responsibilities of the absent parent. While this new role may increase the self-esteem of some youngsters, others find themselves unable to cope and feel overburdened and angry. They sometimes blame themselves and ask questions like, "What did I do?" or "What could I have done to keep them together?"

The sex of the child is another important factor to consider when gauging the effects of divorce. It has been well-documented that boys exhibit more overt and recognizable reactions to divorce than do girls. For instance, while studies have often found no difference in school achievement between girls from two-parent and single-parent homes, father absence through divorce has generally been associated with lower grades for boys. However, some researchers speculate that while girls are likely to be as troubled as boys by marital conflict and divorce, they display less withdrawal or anxiety or other kinds of psychological pain. Sometimes boys appear to exhibit behavior problems long before a divorce becomes final, but girls may not manifest their emotional turmoil until years after a divorce, perhaps not until adolescence. Daughters from divorced families have more negative attitudes about marriage and are often afraid of being betrayed by boyfriends or husbands. There is evidence that some girls from divorced families may be likely to be overly flirtatious, to be sexually active at an early age, to marry young, to be unhappy with their own spouses, and ultimately to get divorced themselves. When fathers continue to play an active role in a girl's life, these differences are less likely to occur.

Parental attitudes and actions before and after the divorce help determine a child's adjustment to it. To prevent children from believing that they are responsible for the divorce, they need to be given as much information as possible in a straightforward manner about the circumstances surrounding the marriage breakup. However, placing blame or providing very personal details is not advisable. Even very young children need to be prepared for the departure of a parent and to be told where they will live and who will take care of them. In some cases, children are used as pawns in a continuing struggle between the parents, and youngsters may learn to play one side against the other. When the postdivorce relationship between the parents allows both of them to show love and interest consistently, when there is a regular visitation schedule by the noncustodial parent, when parents communicate about practical matters related to the children and have consistent rules for them, their adjustment is most successful.

Typically, children live with their mothers after divorce, although more and more parents today are opting for joint custody in which legal responsibility for the children is shared. Some family therapists are concerned that joint custody may mean a partial commitment to the child. It may also introduce complications caused by the physical disruptions necessitated by the child having more than one home environment. However, at its best, this arrangement can encourage the noncustodial parent to play a more active role in the child's life. Some research studies have found that children living in the custody of the parent of the same sex were better adjusted than children living with the opposite-sex parent. This may be why girls generally seem to fare better in divorce situations.

Children adjust to divorce at different rates; even children in the same family may respond differently to the family reorganization. Most children eventually cope, but some do become long-term victims, unable to adjust successfully to the family crisis. The passage of time usually allows healing to take place; children observed three years after divorce are remarkably different from those seen just a few months or a year after the divorce. In the first year after the breakup, routines are often disrupted—meals are unplanned, bath and bed times become irregular, and discipline is haphazard. Children frequently move away from friends, live in a new home, and attend a new school. Unfortunately, the trend is for divorced fathers to generally become less and less available to their children as time goes by. While boys often continue to show academic, social, and behavioral problems two years after divorce, girls do considerably better, becoming much more like their peers from two-parent homes by this time.

Even though divorce causes pain and anxiety for all family members, many single parents discover hidden strengths and find satisfaction in new areas of their lives. Children often become more responsible and mature. Eventually, parents begin to date again, and many marry. Some children are relieved to see a parent less lonely and having fun again, while others resent the new person who seems to be replacing their other parent. Remarriage is least negative for children younger than eight, and most difficult for teenagers, while children between about 8 and 12 respond somewhere in between. Most children experience some degree of anxiety about how the new family situation will affect their lives. They may have to share their home and possessions not only with a new stepparent, but with stepsiblings as well. Their position in the family may change too, per-

haps from being the "baby" to being a middle child. Expecting an easy and fast adjustment will result in frustration and disappointment for everyone. In those instances in which a noncustodial parent begins to spend less and less time with her or his children, while becoming more involved with her or his new spouse's family, the children are bound to be deeply hurt.

Some children respond to remarriage by becoming withdrawn, disruptive in school, neglectful of their academic work, or by running away. The message to children needs to be that the new family member will not be frightened away regardless of the tactics employed by the children. Children need to know that their feelings are being considered, but they should never be placed in the position of making the decision about remarriage. That is the responsibility of the adults only. In some cases, children are afraid to get too close to a stepparent for fear that she or he will abandon them later on, or they may feel that any sign of loyalty or love shown toward a stepparent is a betrayal of the absent parent.

The best adjustment is usually made when children are adequately prepared for the changes in their lives and when they have been given ample opportunities to become acquainted with their future stepparent. When the remarriage does not threaten their close relationship with the noncustodial parent and grandparents, children have an easier time. The new stepparent needs to develop a relationship with the children gradually, rather than trying to take control of the family abruptly. The attachment between stepparents and stepchildren can be a positive and significant one. Finding better ways to communicate and doing enjoyable, interesting activities together can help to cement the bonds of the reconstituted or blended family.

The Death of a Parent

The death of a parent is a tragic loss at any age, but it is devastating when it occurs during childhood or adolescence. It takes a period of time before the full impact of the loss becomes a reality, particularly when the death is sudden. Young children often continue to hope and even expect that the parent will return, as if she or he were just on a trip. One of the reasons remarriage is so painful for a child whose parent has died is that she is then often forced to give up that fantasy. A sense of personal vulnerability often emerges after the death of a parent. Children ask themselves, "Could this happen to me?" They need help in differentiating themselves from the dead parent, particularly if it is a parent of the same sex who has died. Children often express concerns, sometimes indirectly, about the health of the surviving parent. "Will my mother (or father) die also?" is the thought most on their minds. Even a minor illness such as a cold might seem catastrophic to a child already touched by the tragedy of one parent's death.

Following a parent's death, children may feel abandoned and may even feel responsible in some way for the loss. Although a child needs and wants to be loved, she may become hostile, aggressive, or withdrawn. Some children react by regressing to an earlier stage in life. Becoming a baby again can simultaneously dull the intense pain of loss and deny the inevitability of growing up and dying.

In many instances, the child's grieving is delayed because of the necessity of dealing with such matters as changed child-care arrangements or moving to a new home. Moreover, young children are often excluded from the formal mourning process by well-meaning relatives, friends, or neighbors. Adults frequently assume that the less said about the parent's death, the more protected the child will be from the harsh reality of the loss. But a child's feelings, even at a young age, are intense, and while her understanding of death may be incomplete, the enormity of the event will certainly be comprehended. Thus, a child who is taken out for a day of fun at the amusement park while her parent is being buried may later feel confused, guilty, and rejected. Children can cope better with the open sadness of family members than with the silence of deception.

Adolescents are generally more able than children to cope with parental death. Intellectually, socially, and emotionally, they are better prepared for death and its aftermath. They can play a meaningful role in the funeral or other memorial services and can reach out to friends, teachers, clergy, and youth leaders for support. Adolescent girls whose fathers died during their childhood tend to be shy and uncomfortable around males and often anxious about sexual matters.

As is the case with divorce, the support of the remaining parent is sorely needed by the children just at a time when that parent is undergoing her own intense personal crisis. It is crucial that the surviving parent reach out to the child in any way she or he can. Sharing feelings and memories can help the grieving child put her own feelings of loss into words and develop a realistic, rather than idealized, image of the deceased parent. Sharing family beliefs regarding death and an afterlife may also be a source of comfort to the child.

Even years after a parent's death, the child may continue to mourn her great loss and experience the effects of the tragedy. Hearing the words of a song or seeing someone who reminds her of her parent can bring back the pain.

Poverty

Growing up in poverty seriously affects the course of a child's life, in areas ranging from physical development to intellectual growth. More than half of the poor population in the United States of America is accounted for by single mothers and their children. One widely disseminated report suggested that in the first year after divorce, women's income declined considerably while men's income increased. Millions of mothers receive little or no child support payments, and, in many instances, court-ordered payments to custodial mothers are insufficient to meet family needs. Research suggests that some problems in children assumed to be related to the absence of the father may actually be the result of economic hardship.

Poverty exerts both direct and indirect effects on youngsters. Childhood malnutrition is increasing. As a result, millions of children are suffering more frequent illnesses and deficits in growth and intellectual development. A hungry child is distracted and finds it hard to respond appropriately to her environment; thus, her ability to benefit from learning experiences diminishes. Studies have reported that poor children receive lower average scores on intelligence tests and poorer grades in school. Their problem-solving and language skills are often less mature than those used by middle-class children.

Often, the problems observed in disadvantaged children are the result of the subtle, yet powerful, stigma of growing up poor in a relatively affluent country. A girl is embarrassed to go to a friend's party wearing ill-fitting, hand-me-down clothing or to admit to her Girl Scout leaders that she can't pay troop dues or afford the uniform that all the others are wearing. In addition, more advantaged children often treat poor children cruelly.

Parents who are poor care just as much about their children as those who have money, but they are frequently so overburdened by the conditions in which they live that they cannot provide the warmth, stimulation, and time that every child needs. Poor families often lack access to resources that can potentially provide support in times of crisis such as a health emergency or divorce. In addition, individuals living in poverty often feel hopelessly resigned to their situation, and lack a sense of their own competence. Inadequate support networks and the perception of incompetence often extend from one generation to the next, catching children in a vicious cycle of poverty.

When families suddenly find themselves in poverty due to unemployment, every member is affected. Since our society places so much value on work, previously employed individuals find themselves depressed and with decreased self-esteem. The children in the family learn to feel helpless and inadequate by observing parental role models who exhibit these characteristics. In some instances, a tragic side effect of unemployment is child abuse. Frustration and a poor self-image may vent themselves through displaced aggression against one's child.

Family disorganization is certainly not typical of every disadvantaged family. In many poor families, children are cared for and taught in an organized, stimulating home with regular schedules and rules. Children growing up in such circumstances are able to effectively relate to and communicate with others and learn more in school and other learning environments.

Just as families differ in their response to life conditions, children respond in different ways to the circumstances of their lives. Research has discovered that certain children seem to be incredibly resilient, allowing them to cope effectively with even the harshest reality. These exceptional children are self-confident, independent, achievement-oriented, and socially adept. It has been found that a particular inspirational adult often figures prominently in the lives of these strong children. That one person might be a parent or grandparent but could just as well be a member of the clergy, a teacher, a friend's parent, or a Girl Scout leader—anyone with whom a child can identify and who can help a child develop confidence and a sense of future accomplishment.

Specific Tips for Girl Scout Leaders

As a caring, trusted Girl Scout leader with an established relationship with the girls in your troop or group, you are in an ideal position to help girls whose lives have been disrupted by family crises. Unlike a parent or other family member who is directly involved in a crisis situation, you are removed enough to offer calm reassurance and support.

You can also provide the kind of environment that will help girls not directly faced with serious family problems to act with understanding and sensitivity toward those who are dealing with them. Here are some tips:

- Provide an atmosphere of openness, freedom, and trust so that girls will feel comfortable expressing themselves, asking questions, and seeking advice.
- Encourage play and other kinds of physical activity as a natural way for girls to release the tensions associated with family crises and to distract them temporarily from their problems.
- Learn to recognize when to draw a girl out for conversation about something that is troubling her and when to leave her alone with her thoughts.
- Recognize that there are times when peer support is needed and other times when an experienced adult would provide greater comfort to a girl.
- Demonstrate an accepting, nonjudgmental attitude about different family situations.
- Be aware of each girl's home situation so you can understand her problems and extend a helping hand. However, respect the privacy of the girl and her family. Don't pry unnecessarily for details about her family situation.
- Encourage girls going through difficult times at home to continue to attend meetings and participate in troop/group activities. These meetings can lend stability to a child's troubled world.
- Be sensitive to the fact that many children are from poor families or live in single-parent homes.
- Help girls take action to reduce or eliminate minor stresses to lessen their feelings of powerlessness in the face of family problems they cannot solve.
- Show each girl that you think she is important and that you are concerned about her welfare.
- Look for strengths in girls rather than for weaknesses. Help girls see that they can solve problems.
- Help girls to express their anger in ways that do not alienate friends and others who want to support them.
- Be aware that family stress does not always have a negative impact on children. Being forced to deal with problems can provide children with the impetus for developing problem-solving, coping, and social skills.
- Recognize that when girls are consistently quiet, unquestioning, and too well-behaved, they may not be coping well with a family crisis. Help them to express their concerns and feelings.
- Recognize that each girl responds differently to a family crisis. Some may act depressed while others will become aggressive.
- Recognize that even girls in two-parent families feel the burden of divorce and parental death when these crises touch the lives of their close friends.
- Be aware that many children in stable homes worry about the possibility of divorce when they hear their parents fight.
- Be sensitive to the fact that a girl's religious beliefs may affect how her family deals with problems, particularly divorce and death.
- Praise and encourage signs of cooperation in stepsisters who are in the same troop/group rather than focusing on their conflicts.
- Be sensitive when planning activities that either require both parents to attend or that specify which parent is to attend—for example, a mother/daughter weekend or a dad/daughter dinner.

- Remember that special arrangements may have to be made for Girl Scout events when both divorced parents and perhaps stepparents plan to attend. Try to avoid situations in which the hostility of the adults may ruin the day for a girl.
- Let girls know they are free to love both parents, even if one has moved away from home.
- Be aware that a girl may be too embarrassed to tell you directly that she can't afford dues, recognitions, special fees, or a uniform. Be sensitive to her feelings in the manner in which help is offered.
- Encourage parents to participate in troop/group activities related to family crises.
- Find out about agencies in your community that can help girls and their families in crisis situations.
- Try to keep in touch with girls who move to another location.

Suggested Troop/Group Activities to Help Girls Understand and Cope with Family Crises

As a Girl Scout leader, you will want to focus on activities that promote understanding of and sensitivity about contemporary family crises as part of your ongoing program. Girls at all age levels, in partnership with Girl Scout leaders, can gain an awareness of some family problems that are widespread in our society today.

The following recommended activities are designed to help girls understand the nature of family issues and to recognize that all families go through difficult times. Some activities will assist girls in knowing how to cope with their own family problems by helping them to develop problem-solving, stress management, and communication skills. Other activities can provide girls with information about working with others and finding out where to get help in their communities.

The Caring and Coping patch is available to girls from Brownie through Senior Girl Scout age levels who participate in "Facing Family Crises" activities. Information on ordering the patch is available from your council.

Daisy Girl Scout Activities

Daisy Girl Scouts can begin to understand the different kinds of families and also learn that people and strategies can ease the problems families experience. Daisy Girl Scouts can participate in the following activities:

1. Help girls understand that there are many different kinds of families. For example, one child may live with her mother and see her father on some weekends only, while another child lives with her father, stepmother, and stepbrothers.

2. Help girls understand what it means to be poor by sharing their thoughts and feelings. Talk about ways to offer help to poor families and the kinds of assistance girls can give. Be sure to be sensitive to girls' feelings about their family situations.

3. Have girls care for an animal such as a fish that has a short life cycle so that they can learn what death means.

4. Ask girls to think about people they could go to for help in dealing with a problem at home. Encourage them to list trusted adults like relatives, clergy, teachers, and Girl Scout leaders.

5. Have girls suggest fun activities they can do for free. Girls can then select one or two of these activities to carry out. Keep in mind costs like transportation and snacks.

6. Help girls make up a song about the meaning of family. Have them sing the song as a group.

7. Have girls prepare a list of active games that can help to distract them from family problems. Play some of these games.

8. Have girls think of some enjoyable activities they can do to reduce the stress brought on by family situations over which they have no control.

Brownie Girl Scout Activities

Brownie Girl Scouts can learn about some of the problems families face today. They can also begin to develop sensitivity to the feelings of girls who must deal with problems such as divorce or poverty. Brownie Girl Scouts can participate in the following activities:

1. Make a poster on the theme "My Family." It can include words, photographs, and drawings.

2. Share ideas about what you could do to help out at home if your mother or father lost her or his job. You might try doing one or more of these chores even if there has been no job loss.

3. Find pictures that show different kinds of families doing a variety of things. For example, a grandfather works in the garden with his grandchildren; a father and mother play with their child in the park; a grandmother, mother, and teenager prepare dinner together; and a father drives his baby to a day-care center. Make a families montage with the pictures.

4. Invite a social worker or family therapist to talk to your troop or group about sad things that may happen in families and how girls can deal with these problems.

5. Learn what the words divorce, custody, unemployment, and poverty mean.

6. In a group, discuss what you would do if your best friend told you about a big problem in her family.

7. Using dolls or puppets, put on skits about:

- a happy family experience
- a sad family event
- a funny family experience

8. Think of some hobbies or activities you can do when you're feeling upset. Your list might include dancing, drawing, reading, talking to a friend, or playing a special game. Remember this list when something bothers you.

9. As a group, discuss ways to make sure every girl can be included in all troop or group events regardless of cost. Be sure to be sensitive to girls' feelings about their family situations.

10. Brainstorm ideas about how family members can get along better with each other. Try out some of these ideas.

Junior Girl Scout Activities

Junior Girl Scouts can learn about family crises through books, television, and music. They can also find out about family support services and agencies in their communities. Junior Girl Scouts can participate in the following activities:

1. Make a collage that shows family members helping each other during hard times.

2. Read a book about a single-parent family. What were the positive and/or negative effects of this family situation on the children?

3. Watch a television program or see a movie that shows how family members cope with being poor.

4. Find out about careers devoted to working with troubled families. For example, find out what is required to become a social worker, a family therapist, or a psychiatrist.

5. Make posters publicizing family support services in your area. Include telephone numbers and addresses. Find out where these posters can be displayed. Check places like schools, libraries, churches, synagogues, and stores.

6. As a group, brainstorm about the wide variety of family groups that live in our country today—for example, single parents, stepfamilies, traditional families, and extended families.

7. Invite a professional from a family service agency to talk to your troop or group about family problems. Ask her or him to talk about ways to reduce feelings of tension. Include a question-and-answer period.

8. Learn how to help a friend who has been touched deeply by a sad family event such as a serious illness of a brother or sister or a divorce. Role-play what you might say to her. If she needs more help than you can give her, find out where she might go.

9. With your troop or group, brainstorm a list of sports and fitness activities Daisy and Brownie Girl Scouts can do that cost little or no money. Share this list with the troops and groups in your community.

10. Organize a session in which girls sing songs about family issues. Be sure to include some songs that are upbeat and have positive messages. The songs can be popular hits, old songs, or ones made up especially for this event. Listen carefully to the words of each song and discuss its message.

11. Think of some things you might do to improve communication in your family. Try one of your ideas for at least one week.

Cadette Girl Scout Activities

Cadette Girl Scouts can develop their awareness of the effect of family crises on children. They can also find out how to help individuals in their community who must deal directly with the effects of hunger, divorce, and other serious problems. Cadette Girl Scouts can participate in the following activities:

1. Find out what children's books are available in your local library that deal with family problems such as death, divorce, or poverty. Make a list that includes titles, age levels, and subjects. Share this list with members of troops/groups of Brownie, Junior, and Cadette Girl Scouts.

2. With a group, put on a play that dramatizes a family crisis.

3. Write a fairy tale that has a *good* stepparent as a main character (unlike the ones that are usually found in fairy tales such as "Cinderella" or "Snow White"). Share it with younger children as a story or puppet show.

4. Put together a brochure describing support services available in your community for children whose parents have recently separated or divorced, or compile a "kid survival" guide with free or inexpensive activities and services that are available in your community.

5. Organize a group service project that works to reduce hunger in your community. You might work with an organization that is already doing something about this issue.

6. Spend time with a younger child who has been separated from a parent through death or divorce.

7. Volunteer to become part of a peer support group at school or in an agency in your community.

8. Invite a family therapist or other mental health professional to come to a troop or group meeting to discuss ways to help family members in crisis situations. Encourage participants to ask questions and voice their concerns.

9. How sensitive are television writers and producers to the reality of family problems? For one week, keep track of how programs and commercials depict family life today. In a discussion group, compare how the media representation compares with everyday life.

10. For a month, keep a diary or personal journal to describe life in your family. Keep it private or just share it with one special friend so that you'll feel free to express your real feelings.

11. Write to a local or national politician to find out what she or he is doing about reducing poverty. Ask what you can do in your community.

Senior Girl Scout Activities

Senior Girl Scouts can learn about the statistics on poverty and divorce on a local, national, and international level and they can begin to take action to help those affected by family crises. They can also prepare themselves to cope with the kinds of family problems they may confront in their future. Senior Girl Scouts can participate in the following activities:

1. Find out about the extent of poverty in your community. Have the statistics changed in the last 10 years? How many children are living below the national poverty line? How many children are homeless? What is your community doing to reduce this problem? Decide on a way that you can help.

2. Spend some time with a Daisy or Brownie Girl Scout whose family is going through some kind of crisis.

3. With a small group, develop a board game called Family. Include positive and negative events in the lives of families.

4. Think of ways to encourage a divorced or separated parent to play a larger role in the lives of her or his children. Find out about custody laws in your state. Think about what kinds of changes you'd like to see and how you could make them happen. Act on your ideas.

5. In a group, discuss how you might help a friend or younger girl cope with the death of a parent.

6. Learn about national divorce statistics. Find out how many children in this country have parents who are divorced. How have the figures changed over the past 25 years?

7. Find out about family problems in other cultures. How do they compare to those in the United States? What are some of the similarities and differences in the ways they are handled?

8. Talk to trusted adults who seem to have developed effective strategies for coping with stressful family events. Think about whether any of these strategies might work for you.

9. Organize or participate in a peer counseling group at school to help students cope with serious family problems. Work with a school psychologist, guidance counselor, teacher, or principal.

10. Organize a series of discussions that focus on helping adolescent girls begin to prepare themselves to cope with the kinds of family crises they themselves may face some time in the future. Ask various professionals such as psychologists, family physicians, social workers, matrimonial or family lawyers, clergy, and psychiatrists to present information and answer questions. Keep the group small so that participants will feel comfortable raising questions and concerns.

11. Learn about what divorce mediators, marriage counselors, family therapists, and family or matrimonial lawyers do. Interview people who work in these jobs or write to organizations that represent professionals in these fields.

Program Links

The following program links provide additional activities and ideas to help girls understand and cope with family crises.

For Daisy Girl Scouts

Daisy Girl Scouts Leaders' Guide
Pages 12–15, 37–38, 65, 69, 90–101.

For Brownie Girl Scouts

Brownie Girl Scout Handbook
Pages 65–67, 75–76. Brownie Girl Scout Try-Its: Puppets, Dolls, and Plays, pages 176–179; Plants and Animals, pages 179–182.

For Junior Girl Scouts

Junior Girl Scout Handbook
Pages 24–28, 31–33, 43–54, 58–59, 63–64, 72–73, 106–109, 138–144. Communication badge, pages 175–176; Helping in Your Community badge, page 177; Sign of the World, pages 184–185.

Girl Scout Badges and Signs
Child Care, pages 13–14; Home Living, pages 30–31; Tending Toddlers, pages 40–42; Theater, pages 147–149; Sign of the Satellite, pages 198–200.

For Cadette and Senior Girl Scouts

Cadette and Senior Girl Scout Handbook
Pages 21–29, 39–41, 67–70, 95–96, 116–119.

Cadette and Senior Girl Scout Interest Projects
Child Care, pages 14–15; Family Living, pages 22–23; Managing Stress, pages 27–29; Tune In to Well-Being, pages 37–38; Do You Get the Message? pages 46–47; Understanding Yourself and Others, pages 61–62; Money Management, pages 87–88.

Resources

Consultants: family therapists, social workers, clergy, psychologists, psychiatrists, family or matrimonial lawyers, family physicians.

Local groups: family service associations, schools, religious groups, social service agencies, mental health agencies, hospice groups, local bar associations, legal services, self-help groups.

National Organizations

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy
1717 K Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006

American Bar Association
750 North Lake Shore Drive
Chicago, Illinois 60611

American Family Therapy Association
1255 23rd Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20037

American Orthopsychiatric Association
19 West 44th Street
New York, New York 10036

American Psychiatric Association
1400 K Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005

American Psychological Association
1200 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Child Welfare League of America
440 First Street, N.W.
Suite 310
Washington, D.C. 20001

Family Research Council of America
515 Second Street, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002

Family Resource Coalition
230 North Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60601

Family Service America
11700 West Lake Park Drive
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53224

Mothers Without Custody
P.O. Box 56762
Houston, Texas 77256

National Mental Health Association
1021 Prince Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

National Council for Children's Rights
2001 O Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

National Council on Family Relations
1910 West County Road B, Suite 147
St. Paul, Minnesota 55113

National Self-Help Clearinghouse
Graduate School and University Center
City University of New York
33 West 42nd Street
New York, New York 10036

Parents Without Partners
8087 Colesville Road
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Remarried Parents, Inc.
c/o Jack Pflaster
102-20 67th Drive
Forest Hills, New York 11375

Stepfamily Association of America
602 East Joppa Road
Baltimore, Maryland 21204

Step Family Foundation, Inc.
333 West End Avenue
New York, New York 10023

Books

For Girls

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